

children at Risk

Response to Request for Information

Public Education Committee
Texas House of Representatives

SUBJECT: CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Interim Charge 1: Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature.

New Data Available: Analysis of attendance data at State and Education Service Center levels to find patterns of chronic absenteeism; including demographics, location, grade, and other important information

Source of New Data: The Texas Education Agency generously provided Children at Risk with PEIMS data to allow for analysis of attendance patterns in specific locations and among specific sub-groups.

Date of Release of New Data: September 2020

Relevance of Chronic Absenteeism to Public Education

As defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a student is considered chronically absent when they miss 10% or more of school days within an academic year for any reason. Given a 180-day school year, that is at least 18 missed school days. Texas does not currently define chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism negatively impacts a student's ability to learn and decreases the likelihood that s/he will graduate on time, which hinders Texas's ability to meet the goals laid out in the 60x30TX strategic plan.

Students who are chronically absent in pre-k, kindergarten, or first grade are less likely to meet reading levels appropriate for third grade. Students who are not at appropriate reading levels by third grade are 4 times more likely to drop out of

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high school.¹ A student who is chronically absent in any year between eighth and twelfth grade is 7 times more likely to drop out of school.² For high school students, lack of attendance is a better indicator of dropping out than test scores.³ Youth who drop out of school are at higher risk for poor outcomes later in life, including poverty and chronic health issues.

What does the data tell us about chronic absenteeism in Texas?

Statewide, **chronic absenteeism averages at 12.48%**, but can vary dramatically by region⁴. The San Antonio and Lubbock regions have some of the highest rates of chronic absenteeism while the Dallas and Amarillo areas have some of the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism. Similarly, different populations are more impacted than others. Pregnant students have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism (almost 70%) among their peers, suggesting that further supports are needed for these students to prevent missing school time. **Disaggregated by race and ethnicity, we see that the rates for Black and white students are both above the state average (14 and 13.5 % respectively).** The overall average rate for special education students is 17%.

¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2011). Double Jeopardy: How third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518818.pdf>

² University of Utah, Utah Education Policy Center. (2012). Research Brief: Chronic Absenteeism. Retrieved from <https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/31291767-087c-4edb-8042-87f272507c1d>

³ The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. (2007). What Matters for Staying ON-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public High Schools: A close look at course grades, failures, and attendance in the freshman year. Retrieved from <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/07%20What%20Matters%20Final.pdf>

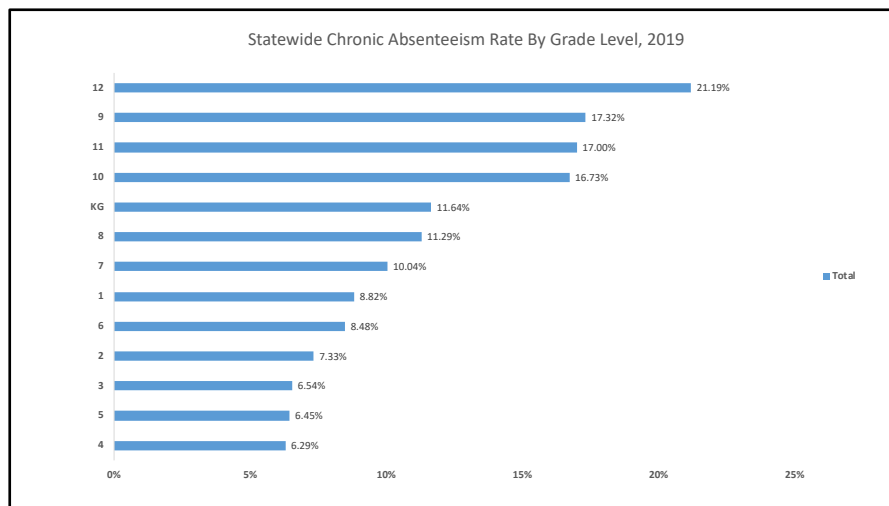
⁴ All CHILDREN AT RISK analyses uses data from Texas Education Agency, Attendance Data, 2018-19 Academic Year, The Public Education Information Management System Data, <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/data-submission/peims/peims-overview>

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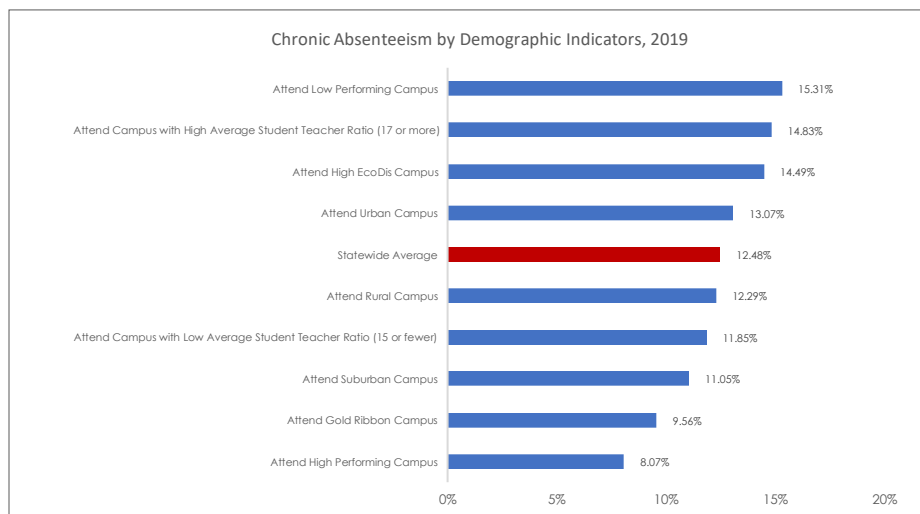


Grade level clearly plays a part: high school grades seem to be at greater risk of chronic absence.

Specifically, **12th grade has the highest rates of chronic absenteeism compared to other**

grades (21%) while 9th grade rates are about 17%.

We also consider different indicators that are associated with chronic absenteeism. Notably, attending a school with **high student teacher ratios** has on average **14.83% Chronic Absenteeism**, the second highest percentage compared to other campus indicators. This could indicate that smaller ratios/class sizes could contribute consistency in attendance through better school climate.



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Specific Policy Recommendation #1: Define chronic absenteeism

Define chronic absenteeism in the Texas Education Code as a student who misses 10% or more of school days within an academic year for any reason (ESSA definition). This will allow monitoring and meaningful evaluation of interventions, and open the door to providing districts with funds to intervene.

Suggested Reform: Amend Section 29.081(d), Education Code to include a definition of "chronic absenteeism" to mean a student who misses 10% of instructional days.

Specific Policy Recommendation #2: Add chronic absenteeism to the "at risk" category as a duplicated count.

Define students who are chronically absent as "at risk" in the Texas Education Code as a student who is at risk of dropping out. This will ensure there is an allocation made to schools specifically on behalf of this population to support interventions on the behalf of these students.

Suggested Reform: Amend Section 29.081(d), Education Code to create an additional "at risk" category to include chronically absent students, as defined above.

Specific Policy Recommendation #3: Ensure reporting. Require that TEA report chronic absenteeism as an indicator.

Suggested Reform: Amend Section 42.006, Education Code to create an indicator for chronic absenteeism in PEIMS.

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